

Legislative Hearing on Wisconsin AB 747
Criminal Justice Committee, Feb. 24, 2010

Transcript of testimony from Charlotte Allmann, delegate Dog Federation of Wisconsin; President Wisconsin Interstate Search and Recovery K9 Team; board member and instructor K9 Obedience Training Club of Menomonee Falls, WI; member Petit Basset Griffon Vendeen Club of America, PBGVCA Hunt Committee and Breed Rescue Committee member.

Speaking today in opposition of AB 747. I did not read a written statement, so here I will try to cover the points of view from memory and my notes.

I fully understand the intent and agree with the spirit of AB 747, but am very concerned with much of the wording and the "law of unintended consequences." I feel that the law is too vague and ambiguous, open to interpretation by people with an agenda, from an angry spouse all the way to an animal rights extremist group, opening up law-abiding citizens to harassment and persecution due to a lack of a clear definition of cruelty, abuse or neglect and degrees thereof, as well as the risks in "failing to prevent" acts of cruelty. It would seem easy to misuse this law, and miss the purpose intended.

As a K9 SAR dog handler, I am occasionally involved in searches for missing people where domestic abuse has resulted in murder. These are highly complex and emotional situations, and require understanding of the dynamics in abusive families, knowing that it is often hidden. Family members are usually in denial. This is where the "FAILURE TO PREVENT" part of this legislation causes me serious concerns. In a troubled family there are often innocent people who are fully aware of the abuse of children, spouse and animals, but are unable to prevent it without risking their own safety. A neighbor could easily be threatened for getting involved trying to stop the cruelty.

Part of our search team activities is to visit schools and talk to kids about our search dogs, how we train and care for them. Frequently we can pick out kids in the group who show signs of abuse related to animals – extreme anxiety around our very safe and well-behaved dogs, for instance – and who probably live with a lot of violence on a daily basis. These kids may even live with people involved in dog fighting, and could possibly be on that road themselves some day. Often the questions they ask are very telling. It seems unlikely that any responsible adult in their lives will be able to "prevent" such violence. Creating a law that might convict these people of a crime is not helpful, and increases risk for everyone.

Other people testifying today will discuss several other trouble spots in this law – my testimony is shared because of my unique perspective as an assistant in the finding of evidence in missing persons cases. I am not a lawyer or a law enforcement officer, but do have considerable training in how not to mess up a case against a murderer by complicating the issue.

I do not see a deterrent against animal abuse or child abuse in this proposed law. The perpetrators of these crimes always feel justified in their actions, and do not think in terms of possible consequences. They argue and rationalize and will rarely admit any guilt. ("Look what you made me do.") In the tragic case of this bill's namesake, the colt Windchill, there was clearly inhumane treatment and people blind to his suffering, and plenty of guilt to go around. There is definitely a connection between the abuse and neglect of animals and children, but there are hundreds of ways that these situations can play out. I usually see the most horrific possible end to family violence – murder. I suspect that there were earlier signs such as animal abuse, that were ignored. Instead of a new law adding the presence of children in order to heighten the penalty against animal abuse, maybe this committee can suggest ways to strengthen existing laws against animal cruelty, increase penalties, offer judges and juries more options, and treat animal abuse more seriously in juvenile cases.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Allmann
WISARK9 delegate to the
Dog Federation of Wisconsin